



Professor Green's gigs

GOLDHAWK SPOTTED some corporate activity by PR operator **Justin Green**, who will be familiar to fans of *The Phoenix* for his militant approach to those pesky music hacks who crossed his former employer, **Denis Desmond's MCD**, where he controlled the guest list for almost 20 years.

In 2011, however, the MCD veteran cut the apron strings and incorporated a company called Wide Awake Communications (WAC), where the other director and 50% shareholder is his wife, **Sylvia Green**. Business here was pretty good and by the end of 2023 the company was sitting on accumulated profits of over €1.4m.

Last year, however, WAC managed to drop a hefty €400,000, although it is unclear what led to the sudden change to the bottom line.

Certainly, Green has been keeping himself busy, sporting a multitude of other hats and has now taken the decision to voluntarily wind up the company, with **Micheál Leydon** of Outlook Accountants installed as liquidator at the end of last month.

There has not been much sign of activity by WAC on the lobbying register in recent times but around the pandemic the operation lobbied extensively for the safe return of ticketed music and entertainment events, as well as the establishment of a cross-departmental task force that included representatives from the commercial showbiz sector. It will come as little surprise that among the clients WAC lobbied for in this period were MCD and its festival partners, Festival Republic.

While WAC obviously took up a fair chunk of Justin's time, he also displayed a heroic capacity for schmoozing on the international stage and in 2019 became



the first Irish recipient of the Atlas Award at the Public Relations Society of America.

Landing that overseas gong would have been the least Justin deserved on foot of his exhausting list of international gigs. He is, for example, the president and academic council director of the big Zurich/New York-based Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management (GAPR), where he also served as CEO.

According to LinkedIn, Green also joined the board of something called the World Com-

mission in Ethical Standards in Public Relations, as well as the Kenya-based Cause Impact PR firm.

In the US, Green landed on the Commission on Public Relations Education in 2019 and he also joined the boards of CMC Connect, iOctane Digital PR and Re-Ignite Public Affairs, all in Lagos, Nigeria. Elsewhere on that continent he was given the role of 'global ambassador' for both the African Public Relations Association and the Public Relations Society of Kenya. Phew!

On top of all this, the PR

Denis O'Brien's radio interference

IN RECENT weeks billionaire **Denis O'Brien** has been shouting his mouth off about the likes of **Ian Drennan** (boss of the Corporate Enforcement Agency), whose position "should be called into question", and also people who fancy working from home – "a total nonsense". It turns out that the Malta-based tax resident has also been losing patience with his radio business across the Irish Sea, where a slash-and-burn strategy has been adopted.

A decade ago O'Brien's Communicorp group splashed out £35m to acquire eight UK radio stations (it now has nine) from the Global Media and Entertainment group: Smooth East Midlands, Smooth North West, Smooth North East, Real Radio North West, Real Radio Yorkshire, Real XS, Capital South Wales and Capital Scotland.

The Real stations were duly rebranded under the Heart franchise and while the assorted broadcasters are owned by the company DOB set up, Communicorp UK, they are mostly operated under licence by Global.

While Dinny offloaded his Communicorp Group in Ireland to the German Bauer Media Audio outfit in 2021, his UK radio business was kept separate from that deal and it is currently the fourth-largest operator "by

commercial share". Dinny holds the controlling stake through an Isle of Man entity called Stangar Investment Holdings.

After the acquisition of the UK radio stations, Stangar held a 98% stake, with the balance held by the CEO and COO of the Smooth and Real radio station group, **Mark Lee** and **Colin Everitt** respectively. Last year, Everitt exited the company and his shares were cancelled.

The British radio market is a tough one but in 2023 O'Brien announced an expansion strategy that would see the introduction of local breakfast, daytime and weekend programming on various stations, starting (but, it turns out, also ending) with Capital Scotland. Singer and social media star **Tallia Storm** was brought in as co-host with **Fat Brestovic** on the all-important breakfast show, a signing that was considered quite the coup.

Barely one year into the gig, however, La Storm changed frequency and exited Capital Scotland, where she was duly replaced by former *Love Island* contestant **Laura Anderson**.

Alas, just 10 months later Anderson also moved the dial and departed the show, with **Robyn Richford** since moving in from her mid-morning slot.



Robyn Richford

The latest Radio Joint Audience Research listenership figures covering the recent quarter to the end of June show that Capital Scotland increased its percentage of total listening time in its survey area from a 3.7% share to 4.8%. There were also increases for Heart Yorkshire, Heart North Wales,

Smooth Radio North East and North West.

The latest accounts filed for Communicorp UK do not, however, make for pleasant reading for Dinny. The figures were signed off last month and cover the year to the end of 2024. They reveal that turnover dropped 10% in the year to £30.6m "due to the challenging economic environment", with the impact exacerbated by problems at the company's sports podcast.

Radio revenue was down 8% on 2023 but the bottom line was protected to a certain extent by a hefty €4.4m slashing of admin-

istrative expenses, including a cut in end-of-year bonuses. The result was a loss of £600,000, while the cash balances at Communicorp UK plummeted from £10.7m to £2.6m. (Accumulated profits stood at £9.5m at the end of December 2024.)

Moreover, further "significant" cuts in administration costs are to be imposed this year, with the programming team to be reduced and offices to be vacated, apart from in Scotland, where the daily programme schedule is to be continued.

At the same time, however, the long-term incentive plan resulted in a €5m increase in directors' remuneration, with the bulk of this going to CEO Mark Lee. Also on board here is **Pat Claffey**, investment director of O'Brien's Island Capital.

The cutbacks will also impact in a big way on the GOMO Outdoor advertising subsidiary. In April this year, Communicorp UK made the decision to "move its outdoor media delivery to third-party providers... before planning to close this subsidiary in 2026".

It looks like O'Brien will have his work cut out making sure his radio operation across the Irish Sea remains a major player in what the company describes as the "highly competitive market" in the UK.

whizz is also now described as Professor Justin Green, no less. There are various reports on the GAPR website that feature the impressive tag, including JG's recent address to the World Bank Group at its headquarters in Washington DC, where he riffed on "responsible communication".

Justin picked up the appellation on one of his international beans in far-off Asia, where in September 2023 he gave the opening address to GAPR's first World Public Relations Forum in India. From there, he jetted 2,000km to a gig at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, which hosted "a prestigious ceremony to confer upon Mr Green the title of Professor of Practice, recognising his outstanding contributions to the world field of public relations".

According to the GAPR website's account: "Prof Green's visit to Dhaka, Bangladesh, has left an indelible mark on the country's PR landscape."

And back home, although WAC has been liquidated, D6-



Justin Green

based Justin still has business ties here courtesy of a company called BA Corporate Management Strategy Ltd, jointly-owned by Justin and his missus.

In case you're wondering, the firm offers an "holistic approach" to clients, describing itself as "a dynamic and forward-thinking strategy and logistics organisation dedicated to empowering businesses with innovative solutions. Whether you're scaling up, streamlining operations, embracing new technologies, or navigating risk,

our expert team delivers the insights and support you need to succeed."

That is some high-quality PR gobbledegook but Goldhawk would expect nothing less.

Pat McDonagh's bad news

IT'S NOT too often that **Pat 'Supermacs' McDonagh** reports losses of €½m but one of his multitude of investment com-



"Looking back, all the warning signs were there"

panies, Cave Projects Ltd (CPL), has just delivered less-than-tasty figures. In this case, however, Pat will be hoping that he can scoop a few million quid from a very lengthy legal battle.

Fans of Goldhawk will be familiar with the early stages of this saga (see *The Phoenix* 30/1/15), when CPL sought to have an €11m-plus judgment summarily registered against Athenry auctioneer **John Kelly** and (at the time) another member of the partnership, **Joe O'Hara**, who opted instead to settle.

Both boys made incendiary claims about the behaviour of Bank of Ireland (BoI), which had loaned their five-man partner-

ship millions for a land deal in 2007. (That loan eventually ended up in Nama and in 2013 was acquired by McDonagh's CPL, which subsequently sought to enforce repayment after being substituted into the bank's High Court action.)

In 2011, BoI had commenced proceedings against the partnership when the loan was not repaid. O'Hara later claimed that €¾m of the overall loan had only been advanced for the purpose of investing in one of the bank's own products, in breach of its own lending guidelines.

In relation to the other funds loaned, O'Hara alleged that the

Brief Cases continued on page 30



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Brief Cases continued from page 29

lolly was drawn down by parties other than him “for purposes not sanctioned by the contracts of the loan”.

Kelly made similar submissions, claiming BoI had engaged in reckless lending and also alleging an “improper relationship” between CPL and the three other members of the partnership, who had already agreed to settle.

Given the amount of mud flying around, Judge **Seamus Noonan** refused to grant CPL the motion for summary judgment in 2015, although O’Hara subsequently settled with the company, leaving Kelly in the firing line to eventually take the full hit in the Four Gold-mines.

What formed an important plank of Kelly’s subsequent appeal was a public notification issued by the Central Bank of Ireland (CBI) in September 2023, shortly before the Court of Appeal hearing, stating that it believed CPL to be engaged in credit-servicing services without

authorisation.

Not too surprisingly, Kelly was of the opinion that the notice retrospectively removed the legal right of McDonagh’s entity to acquire the debt in the first place. This would obviously have rendered any litigation by CPL on foot of the debt null and void.

Alas for the hapless Kelly, there were a number of factors at play here, not least the fact that the legislation relating to the CBI’s public notice had not been passed until long

after the debt had been acquired from Nama by CPL. Moreover, since the issue had not even been raised in High Court pleadings (for obvious reasons), the court of appeal opted not to consider it.

The issue, however, did form the grounds for Kelly’s appeal up to the Supreme Court at the start of this year, which had to rule on whether the auctioneer was even allowed to raise the matter, before examining any implications associated with the CBI’s notice.

As Judge **Gerard Hogan**



Pat McDonagh



determined that there were no exceptional circumstances to warrant such a departure from the usual approach, Kelly’s appeal was dismissed.

Given the scale of the €11m-plus judgment secured against him by CPL, the legal costs being built up could add salt to a pretty big wound.

The figures aren’t exactly great for CPL either, with accounts signed off on April 25 last covering the year to the end of August 2024. The shares here are shown to be held in the names of Nenagh-based **Tom Walsh** and **Tom Kelly** but the accounts make it clear that Supermac’s Ireland Ltd is the parent entity.

The August 2024 figures show that the company’s assets dropped from over €2m to nil during the year, following the disposal of its “financial asset” and an associated impairment based on a “permanent diminution in value” of €454,000. This resulted in a loss for the 12 months of just on €½m. Almost €600,000 was shown as being owed to Supermacs Ireland at the end of the financial year.

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A woman with long blonde hair is lying back in a wicker chair, smiling and stretching her arms above her head. She is wearing a white t-shirt and blue jeans. The chair has thick, light-colored cushions. The background is a bright, sunlit room with large windows.

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